Biggest Loser

Stanley is the downtrodden kid who gets kicked around by just about everyone and everything. He may be our hero, but he's not exactly the hero type, is he? After all, he goes through life with his mouth closed and his head down: he's not the kind of kid that you really notice much.

In fact, when we first meet Stanley, he's a bit like a leaf blowing in the wind. With his characteristic one-shouldered shrug and his absolute no-commitment attitude, he's managed to barely get by in life. He has no friends, and he's regularly bullied by a kid half his size. Bottom line: things aren't great for our buddy Stan.

So what's his problem, anyway? Why is he so down in the dumps? Well, think about it: how would you feel if you woke up every day knowing that you were cursed, knowing that no matter what you did, it just wasn't going to get any better? Sure, you might do your best to convince yourself that the curse isn't real. (After all, who believes in curses?) But you'd still have that doubt in the back of your mind, telling you that despite everything you try, every step you take, failure is just out there waiting for you. Imagine what *that* would do for your confidence.

A Good Kid

Don't get us wrong: Stanley's a good kid, and the narrator gives us enough positive details for us to warm up to him. For example, in the backpack he brings with him to Camp Green Lake, he has only "his toothbrush, toothpaste, and a box of stationery his mother had given him. He'd promised to write to her at least once a week" (3.2). Here at Shmoop, we think writing to your mom regularly is a pretty sweet thing to do. In fact, Stanley's such a nice kid that he even feels sorry for the bus driver who has to drive him to Camp Green Lake (4.16).

Plus, think about all the times Stanley takes one for the team. First, he finds the gold tube and gives it to X-Ray so that X-Ray can get the day off. Then, when Magnet steals the sunflower seeds, he takes the blame. Shmoop's pretty impressed with this, even if it wasn't the best idea in the world.

But despite his quiet kindness, Stanley never gets a break. When he arrives at Camp Green Lake things don't get any better for him: now he just has a lot more people around to bully him. Mr. Sir, Mr. Pendanski, the Warden, X-Ray – they all push Stanley around, just like everyone else always has.

A Hardened Criminal

As he gets used to life at Camp Green Lake, Stanley begins to figure out how to survive. Life isn't easy for this guy, and he needs to adapt to his situation. Sure enough, he is changed by his time at camp – both physically and emotionally. He loses weight, of course, and his body toughens up in response to all the hard work and deprivation he's been through.

But as the narrator tells us, "[h]is muscles and hands weren't the only parts of his body that had toughened over the past several weeks. His heart had hardened as well" (18.24). Stanley kind of gets a 'tude. Influenced by the harsh way of life at Camp Green Lake, he totally snubs Zero when the little guy asks him for help learning to read.

Can we blame him for this? Really – we're asking. Should Stanley have stood up against the harsh world of Camp Green Lake and shown some compassion toward Zero right off the bat? Or was he just trying to protect himself by putting up a wall in the midst of a bad situation?

Or is this all a moot point, since he eventually goes soft and decides to help out little Zero?

[With a Little Help from My Friends](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBDF04fQKtQ)

What makes Stanley finally break out of his shell, of course, and decide to go for the big one, is his concern for Zero. Friendship is a pretty big deal in *Holes* – without this driving force, things might have turned out much differently. And much worse.

Ultimately, when Stanley finally comes through, he proves that he's about as solid as you can get. Heck, he runs off into the desert, risking his life (literally) for his friend. Despite his shortcomings, he's someone you'd absolutely want on your team. He will stick with you until the end, through thick and thin: and *that's* what makes him a hero, and of course, what finally breaks the Yelnats family curse.

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